



African Mask

Preface

For some years now I have been interested in art from other cultures or natural peoples. This may be due to my childhood upbringing, which encouraged openness, curiosity and respect. So I also have a very strong interest in [African Art](#), [Tribal Art](#) and [traditional african masks](#). Patterns and symmetry attract me strongly. By chance I received a paper which drew my attention to the work of some biologists (Horváth G, Pereszleányi Á, Árkossy S, Kriska G. 2019 Striped body painting protects against horseflies. R. Soc. open sci. 6:181325). This paper is about patterns, body painting in connection with the horseflies. I had already heard in a documentary from that these engravings had promoted the evolution of the zebras, because the [tsetse fly](#) can't distinguish the patterns and so zebras are invisible to the tsetse fly. Some complex ideas mixed in my head. So I imagined an *invented* African tribe, whose shamans worship the [zebra as a totem](#), which I named Tze Tze tribe. In my first consideration I wanted to create a mask and research it. I first found a make-up tutorial and how to make an African mask out of cardboard. I combined both and developed my mask of the Tze Tze tribe. Altogether I have further concepts how I can extend the tribe. I see this as an art project to look at cultural developments in the context of evolution and sociology.

Materials

All materials should be in a well sorted work shop. You can also buy everything quickly in a market for creative items.

- Scissors
- Cardboard
- Wood Glue and Brush
- Tin Foil
- Clamps
- Black and White Acrylic Paint
- Primer Spray White
- Spray Paint White
- Heat Gun
- [Precision Knife](#)
- White and Black Acrylic Marker
- Tape
- Water Spray Bottle
- Cotton Swabs

Realisation

Since I didn't want to buy extra cardboard, I used material from my study. As you can see on the photo, the cardboard was used as underlay. It has a thickness of about 1 cm. But you can also use something thicker.



In the first step I recorded a rough idea on cheap paper. I wanted to visualize the thoughts out of my head. I often do this because I can work better with real objects. I will explain this in more detail elsewhere. I roughly cut out this simple template and glued it to the cardboard with tape.



We trace the border of the original with a thick black pencil. We can leave the glued areas free, because we will process them later. Then we draw a horizontal line where our eyes should be. We hold the cardboard in front of our face and stand in front of a mirror. We look slightly at the side where our eyes will be and make a small line with the pencil. Finally a vertical line so that we know where the middle is and can arrange the patterns as symmetrically as possible.



We cut out the mask roughly with scissors. Then clean again. So that we know how to cut out the eyes correctly, we make a pattern, which we record and cut out afterwards. Whoever wants can do

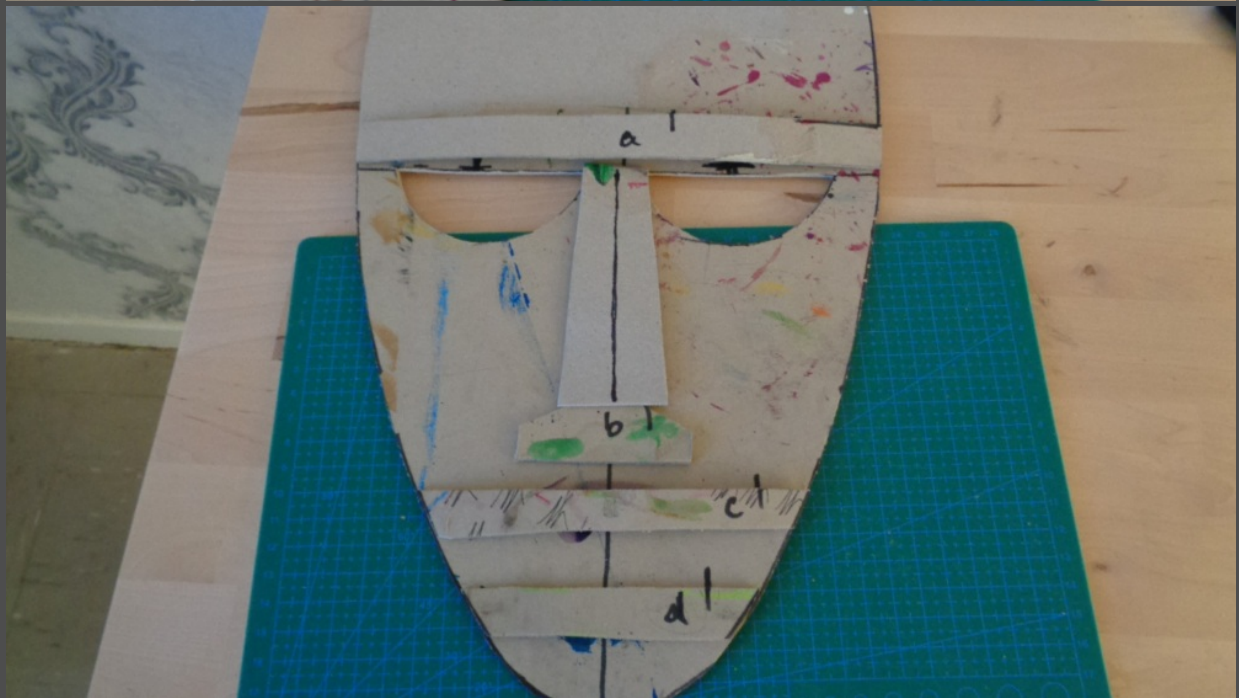
this by hand.



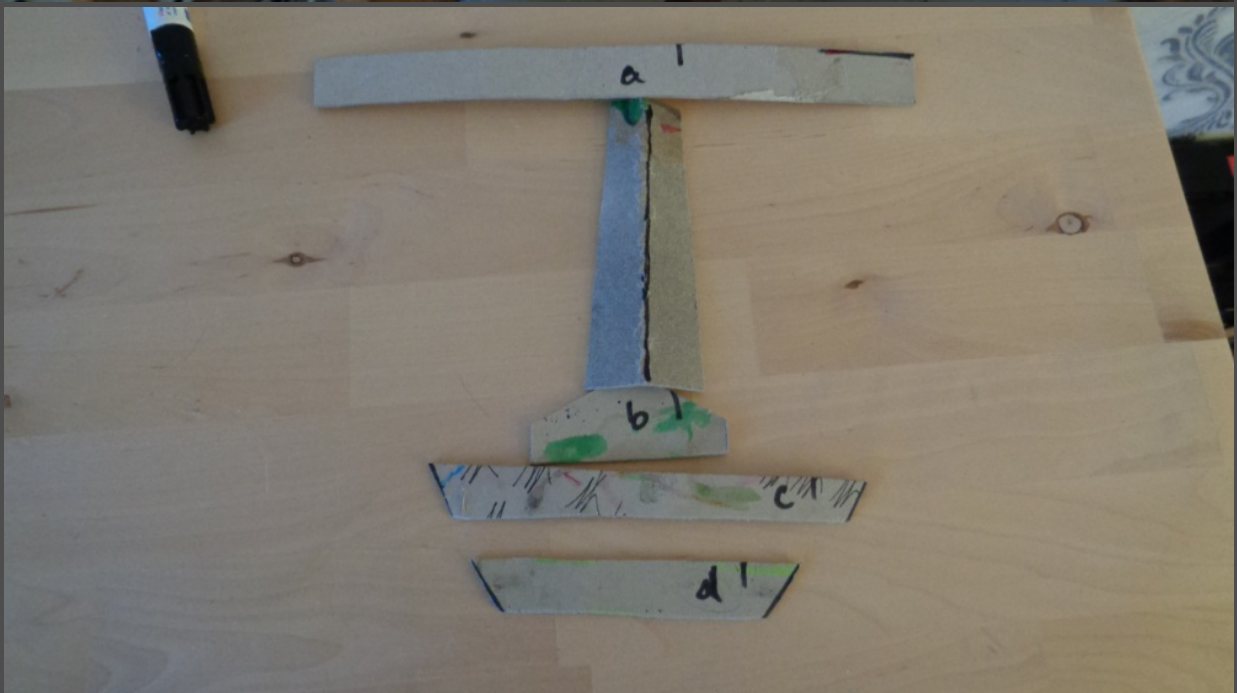


This already looks like a real mask and with that we have finished the preparatory work. In the next steps we will paint the elements from Cardboard and cut them out. These are then attached to the cardboard with wood glue.





To bend the cardboard better, I spray it wet with a water spray bottle. It doesn't matter if the bent areas break a little, because we will cover it with the glue again.



Since masks are always a little round to adapt to the face shape, we wet the cardboard again and bend it to fit. This also loosens the dirty surface which we carefully remove. So that I can bend

better, I use a design chair and a heat gun. With this you can dry the cardboard faster and keep the shape. This can also be done with wood and is an old traditional technique that is used in various professions.





After everything has dried out, we stick our elements on. To do this we coat both sides of the kelp with glue and let it dry for a short moment. Then we press both parts firmly together. For long steering corners we can use clamps.





So that everything dries properly, I put the mask in a place to dry. If you only want to build a mask for your children, you can do without this drying time. I prefer to be on the safe side, even if I am not a very patient person.

Since our mask should not be perfectly smooth on the surface, we use aluminium foil, which we cover with glue. We paint the whole mask with glue and then press the foil onto the cardboard. You can also use a large dry brush to get into the corners. This will make all this a bit less tidy. I want to have it broken in some places so that the mask looks like it's really being used. This makes it look more authentic and realistic.



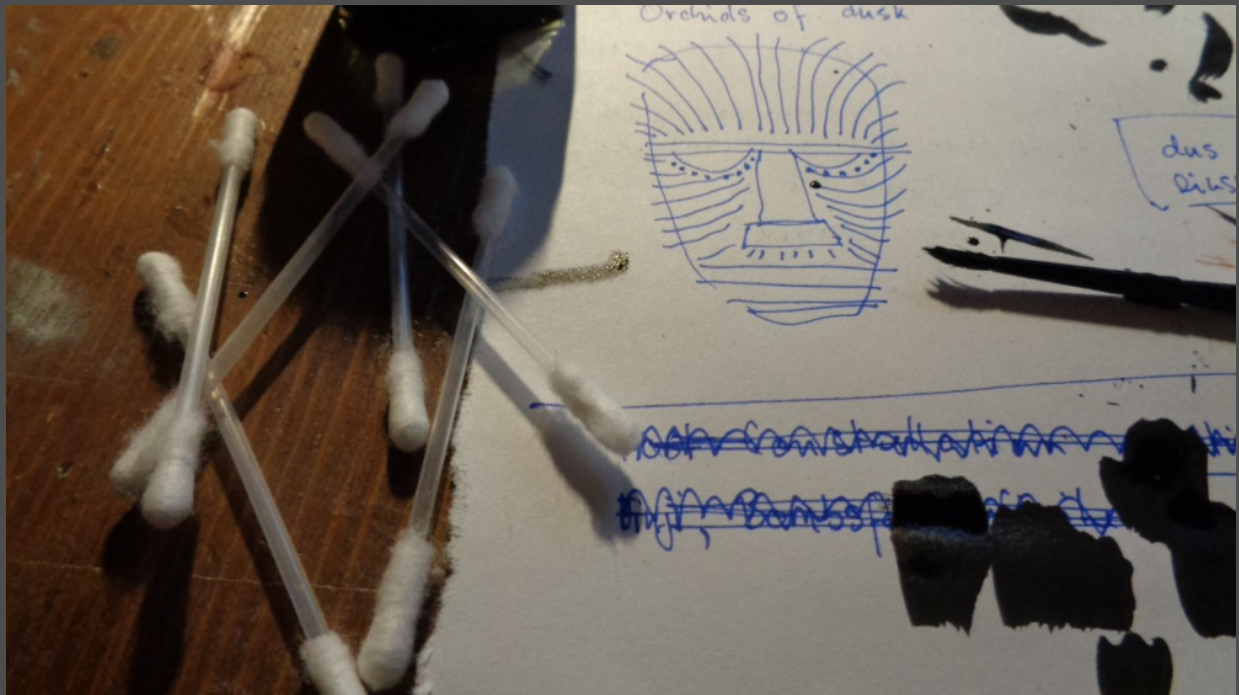
In order to create even more stability, I coated the surface again with glue and put everything away for 24 hours to dry.



For the first coat I used primer and let it dry for at least ten minutes. Then I coated the mask with two layers of white spray. The mask was put away again for 24 hours so that everything could dry properly.



To decorate the mask with patterns I first used black acrylic paint and a bristle brush. With this I painted the rough lines. I let it dry for half an hour. Then I printed the black dots with cotton swabs. This works quite well and the dots become very straight. Better than with a brush. In the last step I painted the details with a white acrylic marker.







Conclusion

Overall I am very satisfied with my project and everything worked better than I had imagined. I also got more ideas during my work, which will flow into other projects. I can't say exactly which direction this will take at the moment, as these are all inaccurate ideas. Something that struck me was that working on the mask is a rather meditative work. One sinks into an indeterminate thoughtlessness. That's strange because I'm mostly unfocused and have problems focusing my thoughts on one point unless I'm dealing with something that really instresses and relaxes me. I will have to examine it more closely.